



GRAM COURSE No. 3: ENGLISH POETRY

Final exams will soon be upon us. This is no time for fun and games. Let us instead study hard, cram fiercely, prepare assiduously.

In this column today let us make a quick survey of English poetry. When we speak of English poetry, we are, of course, speaking of Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Some say that of the three, Keats was the most talented. It is true that he displayed his gifts earlier than the others. While still a schoolboy at St. Westminster he wrote his epic lines:

*If I am good, I get an apple,
So I don't whistle in the chapel.*

From this distinguished beginning, he went on to write another 40,000 poems in his lifetime—which is all the more remarkable when you consider that he was only five feet tall!

I mention this fact only to show that physical problems never keep the true artist from creating. Byron, for example, was lame. Shelley had an ingrown hair. Nonetheless, these three titans of literature turned out a veritable torrent of romantic poetry.

Nor did they neglect their personal lives. Byron, a devil with the ladies, was expelled from Oxford for dipping Elizabeth Barrett's petticoats in an inkwell. He thereupon left England to fight in the Greek war of independence. He fought bravely and well, but women were never far from his mind, as evidenced by this immortal poem:

*How splendid it is to fight for the Greek,
But I don't enjoy it half as much as dancing cheek to cheek.*

While Byron fought in Greece, Shelley remained in England, where he became court poet to the Duke of Marlborough. (It is interesting to note in passing that Marlborough was the original spelling of Marlboro Cigarettes, but the makers were unable to get the entire word on the package. With characteristic ingenuity they cleverly lopped off the final "gh". This, of course, left them with a "gh" lying around the factory. They looked for some place to put it and finally decided to give it to the Director of Sales, Mr. Vincent Van Go. This had a rather curious result. As plain Van Go, he had been a crackjack director of sales, but once he became Van Gogh, he felt a mysterious

irresistible urge to paint. He resigned from the Company and became an artist. It did not work out too well. When Van Gogh learned what a great success Marlboro Cigarettes quickly became—as, of course, they had to with such a flavorful flavor, such a filterful filter, such a flip-top box, such a soft pack—he was so upset about having the firm that he cut off his ear in a fit of chagrin.)

But I digress. Byron, I say, was in Italy and Shelley in England. Meanwhile Keats went to Rome to try to grow. Who does not remember his wistful lyric:

*Although I am only five feet high,
Some day I will look in an elephant's eye.*

But Keats did not grow. His friends, Shelley and Byron, touched to the heart, rushed to Rome to stretch him. This too failed. Then Byron, ever the ladies man, took up with Lucretia Borgia, Catherine of Aragon, and Annie Oakley. Shelley, a



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more domestic type, stayed home with his wife Mary, and wrote his famous poem:

I love to stay home with the missus and write.

And long her and his her and give her a bite. Mary Shelley finally got so tired of being bitten that she went into another room and wrote Frankenstein. Upon reading the manuscript, Shelley and Byron got so scared they immediately booked passage home to England. Keats tried to go too, but he was so small that the clerk at the steamship office couldn't see him over the top of the counter. So Keats remained in Rome and died of a broken heart.

Byron and Shelley cried a lot and then together composed this immortal epitaph:

*Good old Keats, he might have been short,
But he was a great American and a heck of a good sport.*

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*Truth, not poetry, is the business of the Marlboro makers,
and we tell you truly that you can't find a better tasting,
better smoking cigarette than today's Marlboro.*